

11.201, Gateway: Planning Action  
Prof. Xavier de Souza Briggs  
**Lecture 8**

## **I. Housing Review**

Class began with a review of last week's sessions on 'taking stock in social reform.' Last week, Larry shared lots of perspective and did not focus much on Hope VI projects which are the current social reform vehicle in public housing.

Government's attempt at social reform used planning to affect change in the world. The model for public housing was a narrow idea of social reform: Planning → government → affect the world. The Marcuse article attacks the notion of public housing as a social reform ideal because he does not accept narratives. This was government's first attempt to intervene or use planning to resolve poverty with moral issues like public housing.

In this top-down model, reformers carried an agenda to government and government would then fix it (plan used as an instrument). Primary government action is a 'grand tradition' that Friedman referred to in our first reading. It is hard to find models like this today because current models use different approaches such as regulation.

## **II. Curitiba Case**

The class discussion focused on whether Mayor Jaime Lerner was right or wrong to force green changes on Curitiba in the 1970's. He greened the Brazilian city in 72 hours and branded it as a green city. He called this approach 'urban acupuncture' which refers to quick injections that stimulate the body to heal itself.

Some of the challenges that face Curitiba today include: infrastructure, capacity, huge migration to urban center for jobs, political climate, community ownership, and regional planning on inter-jurisdictional problems.

However, in the 1970's, Curitiba was an 'expert autocracy,' the scope focused on the city, and a centralized power block that complained to autocrats was accountable. "Expert autocracy" was a planner's paradise where they had the resources to carry out big plans. Today, the scope is metro-city-regional, and officials are accountable to electoral competition and interest group lobbying.

What changed the political system? A 1964 military coup brought dictatorship to Brazil. Dictators wanted large scale planning to industrialized the nation. By the late 1980's, the economy was sputtering and economic miracles had run out of steam. There were social movements comprised of Christians, workers, peasants, and students. A new constitution was written and a popular president elected. Local governments were empowered; mayors were now elected and competed for power. Cities now looked like they had the American style of political competition. The big change occurred without revolution and oligarchy was still strong throughout Brazil. The article covers other mayors but not other political parties that were campaigning during the same time period.

Why were Lerner's actions the solution? Accountability and livability increased in Curitiba. Lerner would have been kicked out by the autocracy if he did not make big changes. The true veto power belonged to the autocracy, not the people. Lerner was an unelected planner.

Lerner says that he had an easier time under democracy (or so he says) because he could not be pulled from his job and he could get votes for his plans.

At this point during lecture, there was a long debate among students that resulted in the following comparison of planners to doctors. Like a doctor, you can trust a planner to a point. A doctor or planner can inform people to take ownership. But doctors only affect 1 person, while a planner affects many. In Curitiba, people have to co-produce the outcome. There is now a new, younger population that includes many immigrants. They are not the owner's of the 1970's Lerner plan for a green city. Lerner's original plan was not pluralist. The pluralist model would consider many options and hear out ideas.

Robert Moses, famed New York City Planner whose life is portrayed in the biography, The Power Broker by Caro, was never elected. He, like Lerner, was an unelected planner. He was a master builder with grand plans for New York City. He had a Jekyll and Hyde persona because he accomplished a lot, delivered plans, but was not accountable and had many devious tactics. He was known to send plants to meetings he did not care to show up to. He would use techniques to get more money out of investors like telling them they were stupid to invest 10 million that wouldn't finish a job, why not invest another 2 million? He never consulted for ideas. New York City would not be the same today, but he did destroy neighborhoods with highways and public housing.

Planners work in a world of uncertainty with some tools in tangible uses. Lerner seems like an ethical guy and his approach has been used in non-accountable ways. In practice principles, planning has politics.

The strategic challenges in Curitiba in the 1970's were establishing a planning culture (intangible) and create systems and infrastructure (tangible). Today, the challenged is sustaining and renewing systems and creating a planning culture because new problems have emerged over time. The oldest way of living is no longer viable. In Brazil, there is a new political system. People today consider the buses (a hallmark of Lerner's 1970 plan) unsafe and overcrowded – they were not participants in the original planning. Now, they need to co-produce a set of outcomes in order to feel a sense of ownership. Curitiba now looks like other cities in Brazil and must engage people. The electoral system can not engage everyone on its' own.

### III. Altshuler Article

Altshuler is criticizing the comprehensive rational model which rests on two premises:

1. there is an overarching public interest that is *knowable* by planners
2. what is rational from planning is what is above politics and objective

We have ready why the 1950's rational models were viable back then. They believed politics were headaches and used their full scope of expertise outside of politics. Altshuler says these reasons are untenable because the parochial interest groups are invigorating democracy and that makes comprehensive planners seem antagonistic. He also says that in the alleviation of social pain over consequence, the final judge must be the political process. Interest groups conflict with how decisions are made. If you like the pluralistic argument, you buy this because you don't believe interest groups serve everyone, only some people in the political sphere.

Altshuler's implications:

1. Not a normative model – he lays out real world politics and constraints and does not tell a reader how a plan should be. The

only normative assumption is that we are dealing with a democracy and the rest is a real world and analytic account.

2. Pessimistic Account – of how to get broader, collective interest. He does not see people overcoming interests and planners representing the people. He is later criticized for saying planners should be representatives.
3. Role of Planner is Constrained – Altshuler is only talking about a limited tribe of planners as government planners for city comprehensive plans with generalist knowledge. He is not talking about consultants.
4. Planners in Practice – His main message may be dated, but we must understand that his challenge gets planners to a place where they do not submit. They have acquired a humbleness to say they have a limited ability. They can no longer be elitist snobs and celebrate knowledge. They are no longer beyond politics because that can cause a lot of damage (like Lerner).

Altshuler once taught at MIT, and later became Secretary of Transportation. He saw interests groups that saved Cambridge by not allowing highway 128 to cut through the neighborhoods. This is unlike Moses. Moses allowed South Bronx neighborhoods to suffer. Modern community development began at the same time (1960's) Altshuler writes this article.

#### **IV. Final Thoughts**

Several questions outline some learning goals for our class: Is a planner a referee? Is a planner a mediator? Does a planner work as a process agent? What are planners' responsibilities? How do they do that?

Co production outcomes are not a pluralism concept, just a "Xav-ism."

There are two big differences in how today's regional comprehensive planning (e.g. Boston, Vision Utah) work with today's challenges as compared to this case: old comprehensive planning intended to provide experts above politics; they set models for practices (such as regulations). The metro-future regional visioning planners of today build a constituency for ideas to influence practices such as lead by example and mobilization. However, none of these have been adopted in Boston – they are a conversation framework that leads to more sustainable, equitable planning.